

24 Influence of the Spirit of the Age.

with poverty, and sees no resort but to turn pedagogue and teach the children of others their letters in order to win bread for his own. In such a desperate pass it is unfair to judge a man harshly, especially as he had evidently lost faith in the republic as the hope of Italy. But the spirit of sordid calculation, in defiance of professed principles, was a characteristic of the age. It appears in Guicciardini and in the whole band of politicians produced by the Italian tyrannies and republics. Guicciardini was as ready to be the ambassador of the Medici as of the republic, and he was happy in finding the employment that Machiavelli vainly sought. With him, as with Machiavelli, a man's opinions are for the study. They are not meant to inspire or control his actions outside it.

It was from this spirit that Italian statecraft and Machiavelli's political science sprang, and it is not an attractive one. We may be shocked ; we need not be surprised if from this practical school a system was evolved that is not merely secular, but, in some of its aspects, brazenly immoral. In divorcing politics from theology, Machiavelli, as usually happens in a period of reaction, went too far. He divorced politics from morality, because he lived in an atmosphere of political immorality, and could not shake himself free from the spirit of the age. There was certainly nothing new in the mere fact of this divorce, for political immorality has left its black trail throughout the whole course of history. What was new in these modern times was the attempt to construct a sternly logical theory of political immorality, whose basis was only too solidly established on the coarse groundwork of history. If he has no room for a pope in his State, he has nothing but admiration for the clever, depraved politician who occupied the chair of St Peter. Nay, he has hardly any room for God except for political purposes, for he is quite alive to the political value of religion, and occasionally plays the part of the moral philosopher, when State necessity will allow, with extraordinary versatility. But he does not allow these asides to weaken the relentless logic of his principle that in the establishment and government of the State, which he contemplates for Italy, politics are absolutely distinct, not only from theology but from ethics. The ruler has, indeed, his own code of morals, but this code is subject to no law but